



THE FREE STATE FOUNDATION

A Free Market Think Tank for Maryland.....Because Ideas Matter

Perspectives from FSF Scholars

August 17, 2011

Vol. 6, No. 20

Join Dialogue on Healthy Images for Women, Girls

by

Deborah Taylor Tate*

[The Tennessean](#)

Aug. 13, 2011

Last fall, there was one day where most everyone in DC was in agreement. And that's a rare sight.

The Girl Scouts of the USA, the National Association of Broadcasters, the National Cable and Telecommunications Association, and The Creative Coalition hosted everyone from competing media companies to Democrats and Republicans to spend a day focusing on the incredible impact that media has on all of us, especially our children. And we all agreed: we must take action.

Researchers have long provided statistics about the increasing amount of time our kids spend engaged with media. With the prevalence of mobile and hand held devices – "screenagers" are spending upwards of 10 hours a day consuming media (Kaiser 2009). And, what are they seeing? Some healthy and some unhealthy content, especially when it comes to portrayals of women and girls in the media. For example, when female characters do exist most are highly stereotyped and hyper-sexualized. Consider this: Female characters in G-rated films wear virtually the same percentage of

The Free State Foundation
P.O. Box 60680, Potomac, MD 20859
info@freestatefoundation.org
www.freestatefoundation.org

sexually revealing clothing as female characters in R-rated films (Geena Davis Institute on Women in Media).

One of the most passionate people examining the influence of media on girls is Geena Davis. Geena is one of those rare "stars" who has never let accolades and Academy Awards go to her head. Instead, her head has been firmly committed to improving the very medium in which she has built a career. She has encouraged the casting of girls and women in roles which are strong, healthy, active and yes, even Presidential.

Did you know, according to her Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, that despite being 50 percent of the U.S. population, in family films and television, male characters outweigh female characters nearly three to one, and five to one in background or group scenes (A statistic that has remained the same since 1946)?

Only 27 percent of speaking characters are female. And females were over five times as likely as males to be shown in sexually revealing clothing.

And according to the Girl Scout Research Institute, girls compare themselves to fashion models, with more than half of girls (55 percent) admit they diet to lose weight – 31 percent admit to starving themselves or refusing to eat as a strategy to lose weight.

It's time to take action.

Spearheaded by the Girl Scouts of the USA and our partners, Geena Davis and I are proud to join together to Co-chair "Healthy MEdia: Commission on Positive Images of Women and Girls." The Healthy MEdia Commission will host the National Dialogue on what we are showing our children, as well as craft a blueprint with the media industry on ways to promote positive, healthy, and realistic depictions of women and girls as well as healthy relationships and positive role models on screen, too.

We are proud that so many people from inside the media industry have joined with us in this effort – and you can too! We are asking the public to help by joining us at www.girlscouts.org/healthymedia, hosting a forum, writing a letter to the editor, commenting on blogs or social media, tweeting about it, or talking to your children about the content they see on TV. It will take all of us to help create the next generation of leaders, and I hope that one day, with more healthy media images and role models for girls to see and emulate on screen, my new BFF will not be the only female Commander in Chief that our daughters have ever seen!

* Deborah Taylor Tate is a Distinguished Adjunct Senior Fellow at the Free State Foundation and a former Federal Communications Commissioner. She is the co-chair of the "Healthy MEdia Commission," along with Geena Davis, and the first ITU Special Envoy for Child Online Protection and can be reached at advocacy@girlscouts.org.

The Free State Foundation is a nonpartisan, Section 501(c)(3) free market-oriented think tank located in Rockville, Maryland.